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ABSTRACT

The pamphlet reviews political conflict in Peking from spring 1975 through spring 1976. During this period three political groups existed in The People's Republic of China: radicals (populists), moderates (Western-style modernizers), and the military (Chinese equivalent of the Pentagon). Most conflict traditionally occurred between radicals and moderates. The radicals controlled propaganda and educational spheres, whereas the moderates controlled executive Party positions and government outside the propaganda sphere. From May 1975 to January 1976, the two groups maneuvered for political advantage because Chou En-lai was dying. Moderates tried to put their people into important posts and appealed to potential allies through substantive programs. Radicals used the media to hold their ground and raise issues over which they planned to topple Chou En-lai's followers. From mid-January 1976 to April 4, 1976, after Hua Kuo-feng became acting premier, the two groups vied for political favor. Radicals tried to create in the media a political whirlwind to eliminate unwanted programs. Moderates used less visible resources within the bureaucracy to keep the radicals' campaign under control. The military maintained a low profile. From April 5 through May 1976, similar political contests went on, with the ailing Mao Tse-tung favoring both sides at different times. The ultimate balance to be struck in Chinese politics following Mao's death remained unclear as of June 1976. (Author/AV)

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STRATEGIES OF CONFLICT IN CHINA DURING 1975-1976*

by

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An understanding of the strategies of conflict in China over the past year must begin with an appreciation of the relevant political groupings and their respective resources, along with a sense of at least some of the relevant "rules of the game" of Peking politics.

GROUPS, RESOURCES AND RULES OF THE GAME

Peking politics are fluid, and there is much evidence of the give-and-take that characterizes a system of changing coalitions across a range of issues. Nevertheless, there are some relatively deep divisions that allow us to characterize most of the highest level leaders as belonging to one of three major groups: the radicals, the moderates and the military. Given the range of issues subsumed under each of these labels, the names assigned them are inevitably arbitrary and somewhat misleading. The "radicals" could as accurately be called "nativists" and "populists," the "moderates" should perhaps be thought of more as

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"Western-style modernizers," and the "military" probably represents the Chinese equivalent of the Pentagon more than the commanders in the field. At the Politburo level, the radical group includes Chang Ch'un-ch'iao, Wang Hung-wen, Chiang Ch'ing, and Yao Wen-yuan; the moderate group boasts Teng Hsiao-p'ing (before his purge on April 7th), Chou En-lai (until his death on January 8th), Chu Teh, Li Hsien-nien and possibly Yeh Chien-ying (despite his position as Minister of Defense); the military group encompasses Ch'en Hsi-lien, Hsü Shih-yu, and Li Teh-sheng.

The remaining Politburo members are less readily typed by group. Mao Tse-tung clearly eschews complete identification with any single faction, and Wang Tung-hsing, among others, probably identifies more with Mao than with any particular policy cluster. Thus, while these personal labels are somewhat indicative of the "cliques" at the apex of the Chinese Communist Party, there remain grey areas and uncertainties. Hua Kuo-feng, the newly-appointed premier and first vice-chairman of the Party, for instance, seems to lean toward the moderates in terms of his substantive policy preferences but has cultivated a personal relationship with Mao Tse-tung going back probably to 1959 and shows signs of possessing the skills for compromise and conciliation that were the hallmarks of the late premier Chou En-lai's political style.

Most political conflict in Peking seems to occur between the radicals and moderates. Each group realizes, however, that the military possesses resources that can play a major role should they be brought to bear decisively to tip the balance toward one faction or another. Thus, neither radicals nor moderates have summoned the courage to fight for policies that would completely alienate the military. The fact that power remains divided in Peking--and that Mao Tse-tung, who has balanced these groups

off against each other in the past, may die at any time--imposes a powerful constraint on any actions that would induce the military group to choose sides. Thus, while visible conflicts center around the disputes between radicals and moderates, the military continues to exert a subtle but very important influence on Chinese politics.

The radicals and moderates have distinctly different resources at their command, and this uneven distribution of resources affects both how each seeks to achieve its goals in China and what outside observers can tell about this process. The radicals have their strengths in the propaganda and, in a more restricted sense, the educational spheres. This group clearly enjoys disproportionate access to the national news media, especially People's Daily (Jen-min jih-pao) and the Central Committee's theoretical journal Red Flag (Hung-ch'i). It also retains substantial control over the Party propaganda apparatus at all major levels of the hierarchy. Within the educational sphere, the radicals have repeatedly demonstrated an ability to use two of China's premier universities--Peking U. and Tsinghua U.--as bases from which to launch major propaganda attacks on the moderates.

The moderate group, by contrast, concentrates its strength in the executive positions of the Party and government outside of the propaganda sphere. Members of this group thus control the implementation of most Party and government policies and currently dominate the leadership positions in Party committees throughout the multi-layered Chinese political hierarchy.

The Cultural Revolution of the late 1960's left as one of its legacies a special bitterness between the radicals and moderates at all levels of the Chinese political system. During this movement, the radicals

dislodged the moderates from their executive positions and humiliated them publicly. Now the moderates have come back into their own, and neither side any longer feels secure while the other retains a toehold in politics. Thus, personal bitterness and personal rivalries now inevitably tinge the policy debate in China and make substantive issues inextricably linked to personal political fortunes.

Finally, Mao Tse-tung does not exercise detailed, day-to-day control in Peking, and he has not done so for a number of years (indeed, he may never have done so). Mao does retain a veto power over major issues, but he seems to use that veto as does any chief executive--with a keen sense of the possible repercussions of exercising his prerogative. Mao also, of course, possesses immense prestige which he can bring to bear as he wishes--and that others can try to bring into play on their own behalf.

Within the above framework, we can analyze the course of political conflict in Peking from the spring 1975 through the spring 1976. In terms of political strategies pursued by each contending group, this twelve-month period divides into three major segments: spring 1975-Chou En-lai's death in early January 1976; Chou's funeral in mid-January until the Ch'ing Ming festival of April 4, 1976; and April 5-the present (May 1976). We begin with the late spring 1975 because by about that time it must have become clear to all the top leaders that Chou En-lai would expire within a few months of the New Year. All then began taking forceful measures to put themselves in the best possible position for that critical time when new incumbents to Chou's important positions would be chosen and confirmed. Another important Party leader--K'ang Sheng--died just weeks before Chou, and the void left by K'ang's demise may well have

also been seen as part of the political prize at stake. Like Chou, K'ang seems to have been ill for a long time with a degenerative disease, and thus his death may well have been foreseeable as early as the summer.

MAY 1975--JANUARY 1976: MANEUVERING FOR ADVANTAGE

The moderate group's strategy during this period included two components: to rehabilitate cadres sympathetic to the moderate position who had been purged during the Cultural Revolution and place them in key positions in the Party, army and government; and to utilize its available executive and administrative prerogatives to pass programs that would appeal to potential allies.

The major effort to rehabilitate cadres occurred in the summer and early fall. During this period, at least 35 important posts in the Party, army and government were filled by previously vilified leaders who would in all likelihood now side with the moderate cause. Indirect evidence, such as the rehabilitation in early August of a number of people formerly on the staff of the Peking Municipal Party Committee, suggests that additional major rehabilitations were contemplated but never consumated. Thus, P'eng Chen, former head of the Peking Party apparatus, Teng T'o, a former subordinate of P'eng's, and Lu Ting-yi, former head of the Party propaganda apparatus, may well have been active candidates for political ressurection at this time. There is little question that Teng Hsiao-p'ing sparked this "upsurge" in rehabilitations and that the radicals viewed this effort as a direct threat. The radical group did, as noted above, manage to curtail this process short of the goals that Teng had evidently set.

The moderates also sought allies, both from the military group and from within the "grey areas," through major programs they supported during

this period. Thus, around the early part of this period they supported a program of military modernization which, at least by implication, included a modest increase in the military budget and a willingness to import military-related technology from abroad. The moderate group courted the scientific and technological community through its backing for a more rigorous and professional system of higher education, one that placed less emphasis on political virtues and more on high-quality training and technical competence. The Chinese media indicate that the moderates first proposed this program in August and reiterated the proposal in October.

In September-October the moderates convened a month-long national meeting called the Tachai Conference. Tachai is an agricultural brigade in Shansi province, and it has long served as a model of self-reliance and hard work in Chinese agriculture. The "Tachai model" that emerged from this conference, however, stressed agricultural mechanization and also called for a tightening up of discipline within local Party organs. This new Tachai model, then, by implication demanded increased state investment in agriculture, which would please those concerned with agricultural development. The stress on mechanization may likewise have been designed to appeal to those interested in industrial development. And the concern with Party discipline must have been welcomed by people like Hua Kuo-feng, who was at that time playing a major role in questions of discipline. Hua, incidently, gave the major concluding speech at this meeting.

In sum, the moderates tried to put their people into important posts, appeal to potential allies through substantive programs, and promote these programs to the point that they would be hard to reverse by the

time Chou En-lai died. In all this, they probably enjoyed the protection of the late premier.

The radicals had to fight a rearguard action during this period. They used their resources in the Party propaganda apparatus to whip up political campaigns in the media that would hopefully highlight the issues on which they planned to challenge the moderates, buck up the morale of their partisans at lower levels of the bureaucracy, and make it more difficult for the rehabilitated cadres to demote their former purgers. Several of these campaigns had begun before the spring 1975 and simply continued through this period--notably, the campaign to criticize Lin Piao and Confucius and the campaign to focus attention on the need to strengthen the dictatorship of the proletariat. In late August--and on a nation-wide scale beginning in September--the radicals launched a campaign to criticize the ancient Chinese novel Water Margin, and lastly a campaign in the educational sphere began at Tsingha University in November and spread to the national news media in December. Each of these campaigns raised specific issues, albeit frequently through oblique and convoluted allegorical essays. The dictatorship of the proletariat campaign focused particularly on the undesirable socio-economic consequences of the moderates' program of economic modernization, the Water Margin criticism zeroed in on rehabilitation of cadres, the economic program, and the possibility that the moderates would move toward a rapprochement with the USSR, and the educational campaign at the close of the year sought to preserve the Cultural Revolution reforms in the educational sphere and prevent backsliding in this area. In each instance, the moderates tried to sidetrack these campaigns, both through using the same allegorical episodes to make opposite points in the Chinese media

and through raising the spectre of massive and harmful disruption if the campaigns were allowed to develop unchecked.

In sum, during this period the moderates retained the initiative, while the radicals sought to hold their ground and raise the issues over which they would seek to topple Teng Hsiao-p'ing and his followers.

JANUARY 15-APRIL 4, 1976: THE STALEMATE

Following Chou En-lai's funeral on January 15, the issue of naming his successor to the premiership became deadlocked through a series of events still only dimly understood in the West. Once this deadlock developed, Hua Kuo-feng assumed the position of acting premier, and all sides entered a period of frenzied activity to tilt the resulting balance in their favor.

The radicals not surprisingly used a political campaign as their major weapon. They launched a campaign against Teng's 1975 programs and against Teng Hsiao-p'ing personally. They sought at a minimum to keep Teng from achieving the top spot, for Teng had suffered greatly at their hands during the Cultural Revolution and they felt certain he would wreak his revenge if given the opportunity. Subsequent press revelations have indicated that at this time Teng in fact sought both the premiership and a position as head of the Party Central Committee--positions that would have given him control over the fate of the radicals in both the government and Party apparatuses.

The radicals had to devise a plan for allowing this campaign to make a strong impact on Chinese politics without being sidetracked in its early stages. They consequently sought constantly to expand the scope of the declared targets of the attack, to remove the leadership of the

campaign from the Party committees at all levels (as noted above, these committees were generally headed by moderates), and to permit "struggle" (harsh confrontationist) tactics to be used in the campaign instead of allowing only "study" (discussion of the points in key documents and of local conditions in light of these points). Thus, the radicals wanted to permit formation of inter-organizational fighting groups so as to bring the campaign into a mass arena where the radicals' strength might be stronger than that of the moderates.

In terms of targets, this campaign had its genesis in the November/December movement in the educational sphere. The New Years Day editorial in the Chinese media broadened it to the question of one's attitude toward the Cultural Revolution as the key test of one's political orthodoxy. An article on 3 February brought the sphere of science and technology explicitly within the scope of the campaign. On 6 February another article for the first time focused on Teng Hsiao-p'ing's program of the "four modernizations" (of agriculture, industry, science and technology, and defense). February 17th witnessed Teng's personal entry into the ranks of the targets, albeit under the transparent label of a "capitalist roader in the Party." Lastly, a Red Flag article by Ch'u Lan, a pseudonym for either Chiang Ch'ing or one of her close associates, brought the literature and art sphere into the campaign on 3 March.

Once the radicals had launched this attack, that portion of Peking politics visible to outside observers during late January to early April centered on the rules, methods and targets for waging this campaign. The radicals fully used the resources at their command, particularly the national press and their bases at Peking and Tsinghua universities, to

create an impression of great strength and impending victory. In China, as elsewhere, people like to side with the winners--or at least to avoid making firm and public commitments to those who may soon lose power. The radicals very skillfully created the image of a movement on the march, rapidly building up to a crescendo of criticism of Teng Hsiao-p'ing and his "revisionist" programs that seemingly threatened to sweep aside all who hesitated to jump aboard the radical bandwagon.

The radicals also seem to have raised the Soviet issue, although this never became a substantial question in the media effort they waged. A key article by Liang Hsiao (a pseudonym used for authoritative articles from a radical standpoint) in the January 28 People's Daily argued forcefully that a vote for Teng (although he was not mentioned by name) was a vote for reconciliation with the Soviet Union. After this article, the Chinese press scrupulously ignored the delicate question of previous Soviet meddling in Chinese politics and the possibility of pro-Soviet elements in China--ignored this question so uncharacteristically and scrupulously, moreover, that one suspects some special concerns must have been at play. My own belief is that Hua Kuo-feng feels with Teng Hsiao-p'ing that the Chinese should improve somewhat their state-to-state relations with the USSR. Once Hua had been selected as the acting premier (announced on 7 February), it became impolitic to say the least to focus public attention on this issue. This does not mean, however, that the issue did not continue to weigh in the internal discussions among the highest level leaders.

The moderates' strategy centered on trying to narrow the target of the campaign, to control the methods used to implement it, and to keep

its implementation in the hands of the leadership of the moderate-dominated Party committees. They proved successful in these efforts. Right from the start the rules of the campaign prohibited the formation of inter-organizational "fighting groups" that would be beyond the control of any particular Party committee. These rules, indeed, demanded control of the campaign by Party committee leaders at each level and also prohibited "struggle" in favor of "study" on the theory that the masses had to understand the issues fully before they could struggle over them. As noted above, the targets of the campaign did become more inclusive until early March, but after 12 March the target seemed increasingly to focus on Teng Hsiao-p'ing personally. It could be that by this time many of Teng's former stalwarts had decided that their personal loyalty to him would have to take a back seat to their effort to save the programs that both they and Teng felt were in China's best interests.

A number of signs indicate that the moderates at all times remained in a stronger position than the two-inch, eight-column radical headlines in People's Daily each day would suggest. Almost no provincial Party leaders associated themselves publicly with this campaign at any time. Military support was not in evidence until weeks after the campaign had begun, and even then PLA backing remained weak, scattered and carefully hedged. Indeed, very few organizations of any sort lent public support to the campaign at either the national or local levels. Lastly, the campaign never even acquired a fixed name, to say nothing of having a special group set up to run it (a characteristic of other major Chinese political campaigns). Thus, this campaign contained a considerable amount of bluff and bluster--but it nevertheless packed enough of a wallop to undermine Teng Hsiao-p'ing's claim to succeed Chou En-lai.

It is clear, then, that the moderates waged a major effort "in house" to blunt the radicals' offensive. Because the moderates' strength lies in the inner workings of the Chinese bureaucracy, however, their specific efforts remain unknown to outside observers and can be guessed only from their more visible results (or, more accurately, from the "nonresult" of the radicals' failure to launch a more widespread and severe campaign). Almost certainly the military, too, played a critical role in the politics of this period. At a minimum, Ch'en Hsi-lien, the Peking Military Region commander, must have withheld his wholehearted support from Teng Hsiao-p'ing, although no one in the West is quite sure about either this or any other aspect of the PLA's involvement during late January to early April.

In sum, the thirteen weeks after Chou En-lai's death witnessed the politics of a campaign in China--with the radicals attempting to capitalize on their resources in the propaganda sphere to whip up a political whirlwind that would topple their enemies and sweep away the programs they found noxious and the moderates using their less visible resources within the bureaucracy to keep the campaign under some control and prevent it from assuming a life of its own. The military maintained a low public profile throughout this period, although undoubtedly the highest level military leaders in Peking played significant (but unknown) roles in the deliberations that must have taken place.

One character from the Peking cast is missing from the above narrative--Mao Tse-tung. From all indications, Mao at a minimum did not weigh in with full support for Teng Hsiao-p'ing at the critical juncture, although Teng's rehabilitation in 1973 had almost certainly enjoyed the Chairman's blessing. It seems likely that Mao had become increasingly

disenchanted with Teng during the course of 1974-1975 (as he had earlier become disillusioned with Liu Shao-ch'i and Lin Piao, each of whom was at one time seen by Mao as his chosen successor), and thus Mao proved willing to lend his support to a movement to unseat Teng. One can guess at the arguments the radicals made to Mao to turn him against Teng--his overemphasis on economic growth at the cost of cherished political ideals, his antipathy for the Cultural Revolution, his desire to improve relations with the USSR, and the implications of all of these for the Chairman's own political legacy in China. In any event, the course of the campaign during January-April makes clear that Mao either could not or would not remove Teng himself. Rather, he would simply use his prestige and authority to even the balance a bit in a situation that had become lop-sided in favor of the moderates during the previous twelve months.

APRIL 5--PRESENT: THE NEW SEESAW

Events came to a head on April 4-5, 1976. The Ch'ing Ming festival, during which the Chinese pay homage to the deceased, fell on April 4th and witnessed a massive outpouring of sentiment for the late premier Chou En-lai. This sentiment was politically tinged, for the programs for which the radicals had been excoriating Teng for the previous few months had in fact been supported by Premier Chou--a fact well known to all. Indeed, some of the activity in honor of the late premier may have been organized secretly by pro-Teng people. This latter point is suggested by the fact that posters that clearly derided Chiang Ch'ing (Mao's wife and a prominent radical) were put up on the monument to the martyrs of the revolution in Tien-an Men square during this demonstration.

Late at night on April 4th the wreaths to Premier Chou were removed, along with the offending posters. No one knows who ordered or carried out this measure, but it predictably produced great indignation among the throngs in Peking who had participated in the Ch'ing Ming commemoration of Chou. Angry crowds began to gather in the square on the morning of the 5th, and by early afternoon there was a full-scale riot with some 100,000 people involved.

The authorities waited twelve hours before forcefully dispersing the rioters, and all indications suggest that hard bargaining took place during this time over the political configuration that would emerge from this unprecedented ordeal. The leadership secured the agreement of Hua Kuo-feng, who headed the police apparatus, Wu Teh, who as Peking Party leader commanded the local militia, and either Yeh Chien-ying (Minister of Defense) or Ch'en Hsi-lien (Peking Military Region commander), who controlled the army troops in the area, to utilize all three coercive arms to suppress the demonstration. The immediate political results of this massive challenge to the authorities emerged on April 7 in the form of two Central Committee resolutions--one dismissing Teng Hsiao-p'ing from his posts as vice-premier, Chief of Staff of the Army, and member of the Politburo and vice-chairman of the Party; and the other appointing Hua Kuo-feng as premier (elevating him from his former "acting premier" status) and making Hua the "first vice-chairman" of the Party, thereby leapfrogging him in Party rank above Wang Hung-wen. Wang is the only other Party vice-chairman and is a radical.

These two resolutions remain the clearest signs that have emerged as to the political repercussions of the dramatic events of April 4-5. Almost all other indications are contradictory and confused, suggesting

a seesawing political battle in which the situation remains highly fluid. Immediately following publication of these two resolutions, the moderates seemed to make a show of strength. Moderate leaders such as Li Hsien-nien, who had not made a public appearance since around the time of Chou En-lai's funeral, suddenly emerged into the public limelight. Equally striking, almost all well-known radical leaders disappeared from public view. Then suddenly, around April 20, the radicals reappeared in force, and the political rhetoric in the press again began to heat up. Had the moderates scored a clear victory during the frenzied meetings on April 5 and the radicals again regained enough strength to upset things during secret maneuvering over the subsequent two weeks? Was the initial moderate "victory" illusory and had the radicals retained a strong position all along? Did Mao swing toward the moderates at the height of the disruptions on April 5th but then think better of the radicals when he had the opportunity to reflect in a more leisurely way on the situation?

We do not have the answers to these critical questions at the time of this writing. All signs do indicate that the radicals continue to try to launch a far-reaching campaign that will bring them back securely into power and that the moderates continue to frustrate the more ambitious goals of the radicals in this sphere. Rallies held in the provinces in "support of the two Central Committee resolutions" of April 7, to honor Labor Day on May 1, and in honor of a special commemoration of the tenth anniversary of the "May 16th Circular" (a key stepping stone on the way to launching the Cultural Revolution in 1966), moreover, make clear in a number of subtle ways that the disagreements at the Center extend down

into the provinces, with various provinces providing strikingly different portrayals of the targets and tasks of the current political movement in China. Recent pictures of Chairman Mao in the Chinese press are startling in their depiction of an ailing and decrepit leader--a sign to both radicals and moderates alike that the entire chemistry of Peking politics will soon be changed through the removal of the man who has dominated the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party since 1935.

While the balance to be struck in Chinese politics following the death of Mao remains unclear, one might suggest that the moderates have not suffered as severe loses as the removal of Teng and continuing festering radical political campaign might indicate. The little that is known about Hua Kuo-feng's political views suggests that on substantive policy issues he leans heavily toward the moderate camp. Unlike Teng, moreover, Hua does not suffer the vulnerabilities of advanced age, a checkered political history, and numerous personal enemies. In his early fifties, Hua has many more years of political activity to look forward to, and his career to date suggests that he is a highly skilled practitioner of the political arts in China. He is based in the public security forces (China's police apparatus) and in the major provincial Party apparatus of Hunan, and this should be of material help as he tries to defend and consolidate his position as the new heir apparent. While the radicals may have less to fear from Hua's than from Teng's leadership in the immediate future, therefore, over the longer run Hua may prove to be by far the stronger and more effective standard bearer for the moderates' programs. Unfortunately, however, as usual too little is known at this time to predict events with any certainty.